

The University of Chicago

THE IDEA OF LOCALITY IN
ENGLISH CRITICISM OF FICTION
1750-1830

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1934
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By
HOUGHTON WELLS TAYLOR

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INTRODUCTION

(Digest of Chapters 1-iii)

Modern fiction runs very much to complexity of details in characterization. And one of the essential elements in this complexity -- one that has as much as any other to do with the distinctive tone of modern fiction -- is the element of locality. Not only is there the general notion that a character should be "set roundly and solidly in his time";¹ but there are methods of making that round and solid setting imaginatively real to the reader. The relation of character to environment has been pictured not only in the observations of sociologists but in the intuitions of artists as well.

But such intuitions we have not always had with us. In the eighteenth century, when first the novel could claim the prestige of a major art form, the sense of locality was rudimentary at most. For at that time, environment as a determinant of personality and action was only beginning to be understood; while on the other hand, the notion that human nature is everywhere the same, and that the peculiarities of region and fashion are mere small variations not to be too much dwelt upon, generally dominated the creation of fictional characters, and, indeed, reflection on human nature in general.

Views of character as of many other things issued from the conventional cosmic notion of "nature" as a grand design, a universal harmony, in which not only did all particulars have a place

¹Clifton Fadiman, "A modern novelist," Nation, July 13, 1932. p. 41.

and a subordination to the whole, but the relation of particulars was eternally fixed.² "Nature" in its most respected sense then meant, as applied to the world of human phenomena, whatever most clearly showed the universal, permanent motives of man, rather than what was symptomatic of particular, local causes.³ Just as the Deists sought, in religion, a universal basis, understandable by all men, so novelists (though possibly not with the same persistence) sought, in portraying character, to bring out those "touches of nature" which were supposedly fundamental in men of all ages, hence more genuinely important than any temporary variation.⁴ Thus, Fielding says that the lawyer in Joseph Andrews "is not only alive, but hath been so these four thousand years."⁵

There is, however, an ambiguity in the idea of the grand design: if there is order in the universe, there is also tremendous diversity of parts, and why should not the infinite profusion and variety of individuals be as important as the simplicity and order of the universals?⁶ And from this follows an ambiguity in critical theory: since the universal must be elaborated by particulars, just what constitutes an undue particularity? In spite of its apparent clearness and its frequent reassertion, the theory of

²A. O. Lovejoy, "Optimism and Romanticism," PMLA, XLII (1927), 921-45.

³Lovejoy, "'Nature' as aesthetic norm," Modern language notes, XLII (1927), 444-50, esp. def. 2,3,4,6,7,10.

⁴Lovejoy, "The parallel of Deism and classicism," Modern philology, XXIX (1932), 281-99.

⁵Book III, Chap. 1.

⁶Lovejoy argues this ambiguity to have been very important in the rise of Romanticism. See PMLA, XLII, 942 ff.

universals provided no answer to this essential question. The way was left open for the intrusion of any sort of particularity that did not too violently flout the principle that nature was fundamentally the same, though perhaps (it would be allowed) always varying within limits.⁷ The possibilities of such an opening for fiction are obvious.

It is of course a matter of history that the grip of universalism on the theory of fictional characterization has slackened, until it is now weak indeed. That a change was beginning to make itself felt in eighteenth-century fiction, a few perspicacious critics sensed -- none more clearly than the writer of the review of Waverley, in the Quarterly review (1814). His account of the change is as follows:

The earlier novelists [those of the period of the heroic romances] wrote at periods when society was not perfectly formed, and we find that their picture of life was an embodying of their own conceptions of the 'beau ideal.' -- Heroes all generosity and ladies all chastity, exalted above the vulgarities of society and nature....

The novelists next endeavoured to exhibit a general view of society. The characters in Gil Blas and Tom Jones are not individuals so much as specimens of the human race; and these delightful works have been, are, and ever will be popular because they present lively and accurate delineations of the workings of the human soul, and that every man who reads them is obliged to confess to himself, that in similar circumstances with the personages of Le Sage and Fielding, he would probably have acted in the way in which they are described to have done.

From this species the transition to a third was natural. The first class was theory -- it was improved into a generic description, and that again led the way to a more particular classification -- a copying not of man in general, but of men of a peculiar nation, profession, or temper, or to go a step further -- of individuals.

Thus Alcander and Cyrus could never have existed in human society....Tom Jones might have been a Frenchman, and Gil Blas

⁷See, e.g., Chesterfield, in the World, No. 197 (1765); Johnson, in the Adventurer, No. 95 (1753).

an Englishman....while....the characters of the most popular novels of later times are Irish, Scotch, or French, and not in the abstract, men. -- The general operations of nature are circumscribed to her effects on an individual character....⁸

The novel of regional or occupational types (from, let us say, Smollett to Maria Edgeworth and Scott), to which the reviewer alludes in the last paragraph quoted, was for the time a most ingenious compromise between universality and particularity. And we can, at our remove, see more clearly than he whither this regionalism was taking the art of fiction. Though to our taste most of the local color in fiction around 1800 lacks thickness and intuitive depth, though we seldom feel that the novelist makes what our own writers would make of the sense of locality, still there is no doubt that an important change was under way.

⁸This review, long thought to be by Gifford, has recently been attributed to Croker. See Karl G. Pfeiffer, "The authorship of certain articles in the Quarterly review," Philological quarterly, XI (1932), 97-108.

CHAPTER FOUR

"NATURE" AS ORDINARY LIFE; LOCALITY AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL

But though the regional novel may seem at first glance to be the most obvious evidence that a notion of locality was developing in fiction, and may seem the most obvious force in that development, it mingled in the criticism of its own day with the stress of another force which (I think it can be shown) was nearer to being the normal tendency of fictional doctrine at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

We see how the problem of particularity reveals the lack of unity in the neo-classic theory of character, and lets in the idea of diversity, especially in the form of local peculiarity. But it is likewise apparent that the shift in emphasis to diversity did not actually sweep away all opposition. Uniformity continued to be asserted in the theory of fiction after 1800 almost as frequently as before.¹

What is now necessary to observe, is a disintegrative element in this very continued assertion; a style of reasoning which had power to destroy the whole principle of universals while actually seeming to support it, and which produced, under the wing of uniformity, an interest in particulars more typical than any other of the general run of fictional criticism around 1800 and after. Even the interest in local character subserved the idea

¹See introduction.

or "nature" as ordinary life, or the universal localized in scenes of typical occurrence. This slice-of-life version of the idea of locality tended to break up the meaning and the authority of the neo-classic principle of uniformity. The attraction of the "real," which the eighteenth century seemed to feel more and more strongly as it went on, possessed the logical possibility of reducing the idea of universals to something at once obvious and unimportant, and placing the center of literary interest in the multitude of particulars. In such realism as this, the character of the piece is set by the impression of locality, and the more accurately the artist examines the actual world, even though in search of universal truth, the stronger will be that impression.

A review of certain aspects of neo-classic criticism will show that this confusion as to what "nature" is and where, therefore, the universal is to be found, was really fundamental in English classicism. It will show also how, through this confusion, a connection was established between the conventions of neo-classic theory and the new quasi-scientific interest, expressed both in literature and out of it, in the closer observation of real life. By bringing the idea of the universal down to that merely of the common-place, and preferring observation to fancy, critics were able to justify on uniformitarian grounds a type of art the most distinctive quality of which was a rather unclassical degree of diversity.

I

That the poet must follow nature, seemed obvious to neo-classic criticism. But nature is a term of many meanings, corresponding to many notions of what constitutes the limits of the

natural. One of the most inevitable divergences of meaning, in view of the common-sense element in eighteenth century thinking, with its distrust of fantasy, was on the question whether nature means anything more than what is actually possible in the physical world as we know it to be. There were many who held that it does not, and many more who, without taking an extreme position, nevertheless drifted toward a sort of narrowly realistic interpretation of nature.

In an early period in the formation of English neo-classic criticism, there arose one who made the extremist position clear. This was Thomas Hobbes, who, in his Answer to Davenant, said:

There are some that are not pleased with fiction, unless it be bold, not onely to exceed the work, but also the possibility of nature; they would have impenetrable Armors, Inchanted Castles, invulnerable bodies, Iron Men, flying Horses, and a thousand other such things, which are easily figured by them that dare....as truth is the bound of Historical, so the Resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of Poeticall Liberty. In old time amongst the Heathen such strange fictions and Metamorphoses were not so remote from the Articles of their Faith as they are now from ours, and therefore were not so unpleasant. Beyond the actual works of nature a Poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of nature, never.²

Without considering the direct influence of this document, we may observe that it represents a way of thinking which began early in the "classic" period, and, far from being outworn by the time when romanticism is supposed to have arrived, could still be found full of life. Its destructive influence upon the well-being of fantasy was treated by Hurd in his Letters on chivalry and romance, in the conclusion of which he traced

²Joel E. Spingarn, ed., Critical essays of the seventeenth century (Oxford, 1908-09), II, 61-62.

the progress made by common sense at the expense of the marvelous, to the point where it discredited the latter almost completely.³ Though the case was overstated, in the matter of decline of interest in fantasy, Hurd's characterization of the narrow common-sense esthetic was accurate in its broad aspects.

One of the surest ways to detect critical tempers in the neo-classic period is to see to what objects the ever-recurring terms "natural," "probable," "possible," and their opposites, were applied. In so doing, one will of course encounter a bewildering number of individual tastes; but even in the confusion one will not fail to see that the attitude illustrated in Hobbes constantly appears in one form or another. The feeling that history and observation ought to set the limits of "nature" may not have been as all-consuming as Hurd made out, but it suited wonderfully well the temper of the age. The sort of prosaic intellect which refuses to be enticed by a fairy story was here ennobled to such an extent that even the efforts of the Romantic poets produced no sweeping revolution. Dickens, at a later time, could make a horrid example out of Mr. Gradgrind and his esthetic of fact; but one may venture to say that such a villain would have been quite unintelligible in 1800. There was something of Gradgrind, perhaps, in the author who characterized the race of shallow and unthinking readers, in the Bee, May 2, 1792:

Incapable as yet, strictly, to discern all the possibilities of nature's operations; and unwilling to substitute general and abstract ideas, in place of those pleasing and wonderful transactions, which take possession of the mind without

³Letter xii, Works (London, 1811), IV, 333-50.

the labor of inquiry, or tedious investigation; indulging these incredible fictions, they often allow themselves to be carried along with them through the course of ages, notwithstanding the counteracting tendency of reason and nature.⁴

The position of Hobbes may perhaps be said to be some distance from the norm. Yet a tendency toward that position is visible in many writings which are intended more or less to contradict it. Hobbes would have rejected anything that disagreed with present belief as to what could occur (whether it commonly does so or not) in external nature or human action. This view did not necessarily hamper genius; witness Fielding's "Chapter on the marvellous," in Tom Jones (Book VIII, chap. i). And even in many passages of a broader tendency than that chapter, the idea of the need of observing literal possibility is got at in some indirect way.

Pope, for instance, thought of pastoral poetry as portraying (though of course by guesswork) a state of mankind that did actually once exist, and allowed his fancy to lead him on as follows:

It is natural to imagine, that the leisure of those ancient shepherds admitting and inviting some diversion, none was so proper to that solitary and sedentary life as singing; and that in their songs they took occasion to celebrate their own felicity. From hence a poem was invented, and afterwards improved to a perfect image of that happy time; which, by giving us an esteem for the virtues of a former age, might recommend them to the present.⁵

A century later, Sir Walter Scott defended the romances of chivalry on the same general ground, to wit, that the manners therein portrayed had once had influence in the actual affairs of men:

⁴Reprinted in Nathan Drake, ed., The Gleaner (London, 1811), No. 150.

⁵"A discourse on pastoral poetry" (1717), Works, ed. Elwin and Courthope (London, 1871), I, 257-58.

....the maxims of chivalry, high-strained and absurd as they are, did actually influence living beings, and even the fate of kingdoms. If Amadis de Gaule was a fiction, the Chevalier Bayard was a real person.⁶

The rise of the Gothic romance in the later eighteenth century looks like, and to some extent is, an unseating of the narrow common-sense doctrine seen above, and an assertion of the privileges of the fancy. It was indeed a new departure, though not so much without precedent as has sometimes been thought. Yet in England (for its history on the Continent is another matter) it was accepted in a manner which showed common-sense trying to adapt itself to new and inescapable conditions.

The most obvious compromise in the Gothic novel is the "explained supernatural," best exemplified by Ann Radcliffe.⁷ The obvious purpose of the explained supernatural as a general method (or to speak more exactly, the only intelligible purpose) was to give the reader the thrills of the supernatural temporarily and then to retreat to the haven of possibility. It succeeded well enough in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, as also in such other successful pieces as Brockden Brown's Wieland. On the whole, however, it was a greater concession to the narrow doctrine of probability

⁶"Essays on Romance," Works (Edinburgh and London, 1834-40), VI, 213.

⁷An interesting rationalization of the "explained supernatural" appears a little earlier than Ann Radcliffe, in Clara Reeve's preface to her story The old English baron (2nd ed.; London, 1787), in which she says (pp. viii-ix) that Horace Walpole (of whom she professes to be a follower) failed to produce the intended effect, in The Castle of Otranto, because his supernatural incidents were too strained, too far beyond the reader's capacity for belief, to create the requisite excitement. In her words: "....the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost verge of probability, the effect had been preserved...." She was not unwilling to allow supernatural appearances in some manner; but to her mind, the gigantic sword and helmet, the verigrating portrait, the skeleton ghost, were destructive of credibility and hence of the desired excitement. In her own practice, the supernaturalism was restrained indeed.

than the generality of novel-readers demanded.

Narrow common-sense seems usually to have been appeased, during this period of terror-romance, by a more liberal doctrine, though one not less distinctly neo-classic. The Aristotelian doctrine of the "probable impossible" was not unknown to the eighteenth century. It may have meant little to critics like Hobbes and Fielding, who had small taste for fantasy; but to men of a different inclination it was conveniently present in the back of the mind, against the coming of a striking novelty like Otranto or Vathek (not to mention the much earlier Arabian Nights and other Oriental paraphrases and imitations). The learned Thomas Twining, in the notes to his translation of the Poetics, in 1789, took pains to point out the superior probability of Shakespeare's Caliban, an "impossible" character, to Lovelace in Richardson's Clarissa, whom he asserted to be actually less credible to the imagination, though represented as an actual human being.⁸

The basis of Twining's judgment was an obvious one, and one which must have been constantly present in the minds of those who enjoyed Gothic romance. Walpole defined it in his preface to the second edition of Otranto, in this manner:

Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he [i.e. Walpole himself] wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.⁹

In other words, the problem of the supernaturalist in fiction is, not to confine himself, in the premises of his narrative, to what

⁸Aristotle's treatise of poetry, translated.... (London, 1789), p. 119, n.2.

⁹Works (London, 1798), II, 7-8.

would conciliate the reader's sense of the possible, but to select what premises he will and simply preserve consistency in the conduct of the characters under those premises; thereby calling upon the reader's sense of the universally probable in human conduct. In this doctrine, the refusal to countenance the scientifically impossible is got away from; but the tenacious common-sense of the eighteenth century will admit no trifling with what human nature is normally supposed capable of.

The historical background which Walpole provided for his doctrine shows that both sides of the issue were clearly within his consciousness. In the "ancient romances" (to which he considered his own work to have some affinity), he said, "all was imagination and improbability"; whereas in modern fiction, written under a more reasonable philosophy, "nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success." But this very reasonableness, this desire to keep within nature, has had the effect of limiting fiction, more than was necessary, to observable reality; so great was the reaction from the extravagance of the old romantic manner. As he says:

Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if, in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.¹⁰

Thus, employing a logic almost the same as that of Hurd in his Letters on chivalry and romance, Walpole devised an esthetic of the supernatural tale which had still some strong ties with the sense of reality.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 7.

The suitability of this esthetic to English taste would seem evident a priori. Indications are frequent, moreover, that it was the criterion most generally accepted by the critics, when they were willing to give serious attention to Gothic romances at all. Sir Walter Scott, whose opinions on fiction were usually an improved statement of notions widely current, set down the doctrine of consistency in the supernatural with ideal precision:

In the class of fictitious narrations to which we allude, the author opens a sort of account-current with the reader; drawing upon him, in the first place, for credit to that degree of the marvellous which he proposes to employ; and becoming virtually bound, in consequence of this indulgence, that his personages shall conduct themselves, in the extraordinary circumstances in which they are placed, according to the rules of probability, and the nature of the human heart. In this view, the probable is far from being laid out of sight even amid the wildest freaks of imagination; on the contrary, we grant the extraordinary postulates which the author demands as the foundation of his narrative, only on condition of his deducing the consequences with logical precision.¹¹

The force of the doctrine of consistency is even more clearly to be observed in what English critics rejected -- for example, much of the German supernatural or quasi-supernatural stuff, which was cast into the outer darkness of the "fantastic." Even Scott, who at the start of his career had interested himself considerably in German romantic matter, grew unsympathetic in time, and in his review of the works of Hoffmann dilated upon the difference between the probable and the fantastic in supernatural tales -- Hoffmann possessing, of course, the latter quality, and being condemned with scant mercy.¹² Continental romances in general gave the critics of Scott's day much trouble on the score of probability, as can be seen by a perusal of such leading journals

¹¹Review of *Frankenstein*, in *Works* (1834), XVIII, 253-54.

¹²Review of Hoffman's novels, *Works* (1834), XVIII, 290-92.

as the Edinburgh, the Quarterly, the Monthly, or the Critical. And there was possibly no romancing more incomprehensible to the English critics than that which one of them described as "a species of mongrel fantasticality, peculiarly congenial to the Germans, who have parcelled out the province of ultra romance into a variety of departments, of the nice distinction between which the readers of other nations have but little conception."¹³

Thus it was evident that English taste in the Gothic had usually around it the restraining influence of a common-sense that demanded some feeling of the real or normal in human action, even in the midst of a tale expressly designed to depart from reality. The principle applied most narrowly by Hobbes, and held more loosely by many other critics of importance, gave to English taste in the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth a character observable almost everywhere one looks.

II

One of the signs of this character was a certain distinction, made occasionally during the century, between the art of the imagination and the art of the emotions. The origin of the distinction was in the theoretical problem of the source from which the artist could best bring forth the universals of nature. The question might be phrased thus: should these universals be discovered by the light of nature, or natural reason, that capacity of penetrating the particular accidents of reality and disclosing the true forms which nature intended? Or should they be ascertained by no penetration of the outward scene, but merely by generalization from experience by a sort of averaging up of par-

¹³The literary examiner (London, 1823), p. 123.

ticular instances (or, better, a selection of those instances which are most normal)?

Bishop Hurd, for example, considered the problem in these terms:

....truth may be followed too closely in works of imitation, as is evident in two respects. For, 1. the artist, when he would give a Copy of nature, may confine himself too scrupulously to the exhibition of particulars, and so fail of representing the general idea of the kind. Or, 2. in applying himself to give the general idea, he may collect it from an enlarged view of real life, whereas it were still better taken from the nobler conception of it as subsisting only in the mind. This last is the kind of censure we pass upon the Flemish school of painting, which takes its model from real nature, and not, as the Italian, from the contemplative idea of beauty. The former corresponds to that other fault objected also to the Flemish masters, which consists in their copying from particular odd and grotesque nature in contradistinction to general and graceful nature.¹⁴

Though the emphasis in this passage is a little obscure, the intention is still visible to assert that the mere use of observed particulars, even when they are made to yield universals by the process of averaging, gives lower artistic results than does the retreat to natural reason, the power of recognizing universal truths which is the common property, in varying degrees, of all men, and which enables them to arrive at similar conclusions even with different backgrounds of experience.¹⁵ And this view was

¹⁴Q. Horatii Flacci ars poetica, note to l. 317 [i.e. 318], Works (1811), I, 255-56.

¹⁵Descriptions of the light of nature are numerous. See, e.g., the following from Kames, Elements of criticism (Edinburgh, 1762), II, 134-36: "How do we come to understand external signs, so as readily to ascribe to each sign its proper passion? We have seen that this branch of knowledge, cannot be derived originally from sight, nor from experience. It is then implanted in us by nature? The following considerations will help us to answer this question in the affirmative. In the first place, the external signs of passion must be natural; for they are invariably the same in every country....Secondly, we are not even indebted to experience for the knowledge that these expressions are natural and universal. We are so framed as to have an innate conviction of the fact....And upon second thoughts, the question may be answered without any preliminaries. If the branch of knowledge we have been inquiring

sufficiently wide-spread. It inhered in the idea of poetic justice in the drama (as showing what nature intended, in opposition to the violations of ideal justice which may occur as accidents in real life), in the notion that comedy and tragedy should be separate (since both are pictures of general nature), as well as in the relegation to a low status of genre-pieces of all sorts, such as the pictures of Hogarth and the Dutch realists.

But another attitude was possible. The light of nature might enable the artist to see through the accidents that obscured universal truth; but it might also lead him to deprive his work of that coloring of real human nature which is for some artistic purposes indispensable. Hurd's praise of Sophocles was but one interpretation of the passage in Aristotle; a contrary interpretation of the passage could be made, as Thomas Twining, an Aristotelian par excellence of the late eighteenth century, showed:

In Sophocles, we find more elevation, more dignity, more of that improved likeness, and ideal perfection, which the philosopher expresses....In Euripides, we....are oftener reminded of the common nature and common life, which we all see around us. And if this, in conjunction with other causes, be sometimes found to lower the imitations of this Poet, beneath the proper level of Tragic dignity....the fault is amply redeemed, perhaps in those very parts, by the pleasure which results from the closeness and obviousness of the imitation; certainly, in many others, by those precious touches of nature, which must, at once, strike every individual of every audience; such, if I mistake not, as are much more rarely to be found in Sophocles, and such, perhaps, as, after all that we have heard about the beau ideal and improved nature, can only be produced by an exact transcript of nature, as it is; of what the Poet has actually felt himself, and actually seen in others....

The truth seems to be, that both in Poetry, and in Painting, if the sublime be aimed at, the Poet, and the Artist, must

about be not derived from sight nor from experience, there is no remaining source from whence it can be derived but from nature." See also ibid., chap. xxv, passim; Hume, "The standard of taste," Essays and treatises (Edinburgh, 1825), I, 221-46.

look up....their eyes may "glance from earth to heaven," and they may "body forth the form of things unknown." But if emotion and the pathetic be their object, they will, neither of them, attain their end, unless they submit to descend a little towards earth, and to copy with some closeness that nature which is before their eyes.¹⁶

A distinction of the utmost importance is seen here: the sublime on the one hand, and the pathetic on the other; improved and generalized nature where the artist desires to strike the imagination, but actual and familiar, therefore somewhat localized, nature where he wishes to appeal to human feelings.¹⁷ And this distinction becomes more significant when one finds critics of the mid-eighteenth century and later making out, though not always with entire clearness, an actual argument for the superiority of familiar art. The general background of this argument is furnished thus by Hume:

Any pleasure, with which we are acquainted, affects us more than any other, which we own to be superior, but of whose nature we are wholly ignorant. Of the one we can form a particular and determinate idea; the other we conceive under the general notion of pleasure; and 'tis certain, that the more general and universal any of our ideas are, the less influence they have upon the imagination.¹⁸

On this broad basis were erected numerous pleas for the advancement of the art of treating those "private and domestic distresses" by which "the softer emotions of the heart are most strongly excited."¹⁹ It was said, for example, that "On scenes of

¹⁶Aristotle's treatise of poetry, translated...., pp. 509-10.

¹⁷Cf. Hurd, Letters on chivalry and romance, No. X, Works (1811), IV, 325: "...in those species [of poetry] that address themselves to the heart and would obtain their end, not through the imagination, but thro' the passions, there the liberty of transgressing nature, I mean the real powers and properties of human nature is infinitely restrained..."

¹⁸A treatise of human nature, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896), pp. 424-25. Cf. ibid., p. 427.

¹⁹The Mirror, No. 72 (1779).

public sorrow and national regret, we gaze as upon those gallery pictures which strike us with wonder and admiration; domestic calamity is like the miniature of a friend, which we wear in our bosoms, and keep for secret looks and solitary enjoyment."²⁰ And it was pointed out that even "in tragedies which employ dignified personages to carry on the action of the fable, we are rarely affected by any distresses which might not equally belong to those who move in the middle sphere of life...."²¹

At a time when fiction was still generally under suspicion, bourgeois tragedy was touted by its authors on just such grounds as have been discussed -- namely, its closeness to ordinary life. Aaron Hill, for example, in the Prologue to The fatal extravagance, (1721), said:

To ills, remote from our domestic fears,
We lend our wonder, but with-hold our tears.
Not so, when, from such passions as our own,
Some favourite folly's dreadful fate is shown;
There the soul bleeds for what it feels within;
And conscious pity shakes, at suffering sin.
O! give attention to the moving scene,
And shun what yet may be, by what has been.²²

²⁰Ibid.

²¹N. A. Vigors, The nature and extent of poetick licence (2nd ed.: London, 1813), p. 91. See also, e.g., Mackenzie, the Lounger, No. 28 (1785); The characters of Theophrastus.... (London, 1831), pp. xi-xii. A view directly opposed to the foregoing was expressed by Coleridge ("Satyrane's letters," No. 2, Biographia litteraria, ed. Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), II, 158-59), when in speaking of dramatists of periods before his own, he remarked that they did not "condescend in tragedy to wheedle away the applause of the spectators, by representing before them fac-similes of their own mean selves in all their existing meanness, or to work on their sluggish sympathies by a pathos not a whit more respectable than the maudlin tears of drunkenness." Of the French classic dramatists in special he said previously, in the same context: "Still, they excite the minds of the spectators to active thought, to a striving after ideal excellence. The soul is not stupefied into mere sensations by a worthless sympathy with our own ordinary sufferings...."

²²Dramatic works (London, 1760), I, 291. Cf. the Preface to the same play (ibid., p. 289), also the Prologue "written upon the revival" (1792); ibid., p. 292. George Lillo, in the Dedication to George Barnwell (1731). Works (London, 1775), I, sig.*H3 verso,

The success of bourgeois tragedy, followed by the greater success of Richardson in the emotional novel of "real life," did probably as much as any other forces to set up this doctrine of realism in the arts, and to bring about eventually such lines of reasoning as the following:

....we are much more creatures of feeling than of imagination; and that nature being predominant in our passions, all attempts to excite the sympathetic emotions must succeed in proportion as they approach her standard. I before admitted, that the novelty presented by nature, is of a nobler kind than that produced by art. Uncommon characters and extraordinary events, therefore, which have a natural foundation, will ²³always interest more than those which are wholly artificial.

The distinction between imagination and feeling, with the resultant concession to the claims of real as opposed to ideal existence, suggests strongly the adaptation of the common-sense esthetic to the problem of emotion in art. In its obvious one-sidedness it shows kinship with the position represented by Hobbes.

III

Another development from that position, and one of more variety of application, was the notion that any fiction at all has a certain disadvantage compared with genuine fact. This amounted to a revival of the age-old issue of the relative superiority of truth and fiction. The notion that fiction (i.e. as opposed to fact) is useless or wrong can be found as far back as Plato; and in the Renaissance it was necessary to show, with the aid of Aristotelian universalism, that the fictions of poetry were not

espoused the same principles, when he said that "tragedy is so far from losing its dignity, by being accommodated to the circumstances of the generality of mankind, that it is more truly august in proportion to the extent of its influence, and the numbers that are properly affected by it...." Cf. Prologue to the same play (*ibid.*, p.1101).

²³J. Aikin, Letters from a father to his son (London, 1793), p.81.

merely immoral lies. Though, on the whole, fictitious narrative has always existed and sooner or later been justified, the notion crops out from time to time in literary criticism that fiction needs in some way the authority derivable only from literal and historical truth.

In a certain vague form, this interest in the historically true is found in the writings of some of the most conservative neo-classic critics, and seems to be a frequent accompaniment, if not an inseparable part, of conventional criticism. The classical authority seems to be an inaccurate interpretation of Aristotle. In discussing the sources of tragic stories, Aristotle had said that some of the most successful had been taken from history or tradition. This pronouncement, as its context showed, was not intended to be derogatory to purely fictitious stories; yet such an interpretation was possible to a race of critics eager to expand the limited bulk of doctrine afforded by the Poetics. Thus Hurd, whose classicism is in the main pretty regular, in spite of some variations of his own, says:

Tragedy succeeds best, when the subject is real; comedy, when it is feigned. What would this say, but that tragedy, turning our attention principally on the action represented, finds means to interest us more strongly on the persuasion of its being taken from actual life? While comedy, on the other hand, can neglect these scrupulous measures of probability, as intent only on exhibiting characters; for which purpose an invented story will serve much better....

And this difference, we may observe, explains the reason why tragedies are often formed on the most trite and vulgar subjects, whereas a new subject is generally demanded in comedy. The reality of the story being of so much consequence to interest the affections, the more known it is, the fitter for the poet's purpose.²⁴

In this passage Hurd, arguing from the premise that a sense of reality was necessary to the stirring of the "affections"

²⁴On the provinces of the drama, chap.1, Works (1811), II, 46.

(that being the purpose of tragic stories, though not of other kinds necessarily), concluded plausibly that the "true" story would provide that sense. The appeal of this conclusion of Hurd's own day is illustrated in various remarks of Samuel Johnson, who held throughout his life with great consistency to the principle he once enunciated, "that we can always feel more than we can imagine, and that the most artful fiction must give way to truth."²⁵ This statement was apropos of two of Virgil's pastorals, which Johnson asserted to have been "produced by events that really happened." On other occasions he assigned historicity to events equally difficult to verify. In comparing Dryden's Alexander's feast with Pope's Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, he observed that "history will always take stronger hold of the attention than fable: the passions excited by Dryden are the pleasures and pains of real life, the scene of Pope is laid in imaginary existence."²⁶ And the misfortunes of Heloise and Abelard moved him to a similar generalization:

The heart naturally loves truth. The adventures and misfortunes of this illustrious pair are known from undisputed history....So new and so affecting is their story, that it supersedes invention, and imagination ranges at full liberty without straggling into scenes of fable.²⁷

In this, Johnson was moved by a certain individual taste²⁸ as much as by conventions of neo-classic criticism. He had, it

²⁵The Adventurer, No. 92 (1753).

²⁶"Pope," Lives of the English poets, ed. Hill, (Oxford, 1905), III, 227.

²⁷Ibid., p. 235

²⁸Johnson's taste for reality was attested by Boswell; in the Life of Johnson, ed. Hill (Oxford, 1887), III, 216, we find: "Johnson, who had an eager and unceasing curiosity to know human life in all its variety, told me, that he attended Mr. Welch [who succeeded Fielding as a justice of the peace in Westminster] in his office for a whole winter, to hear the examinations of the culprits...."

is true, a frequent aversion to works of fancy -- an aversion not absolutely called for by neo-classic doctrine or by the good sense which it was supposed to foster. His congratulation of Pope for not having written American pastorals is an amusing symptom; his reason was that since Pope "must have painted scenes which he never saw, and manners which he never knew, his performance, though it might have been a pleasing amusement of fancy, would have exhibited no representation of nature or of life."²⁹

However, individual or not with Johnson, this taste prospered and grew during the period covered by his critical writings, which were, all allowances made for his own idiosyncrasies, an indication of the trend of the times.

The interest in the close observation of real life had, moreover, an inevitable extension. The search for realities to observe did not have to stop with the life immediately about one. The whole range of history was available. The question of the relative value or at least the supplementary virtues of fiction and history gained thereby vitality from another source. The arguments of Priestley on this point were ingenious. He admitted fiction to be worthy of the attention of great geniuses; but he doubted its ultimate usefulness for purposes more sober than "to amuse the imagination, and give play to the passions in general" -- which was, he said, "almost the only avowed scope of all works, of fiction, both in prose and verse." Concerning the more substantial usefulness of history, he proceeded thus:

Whatever valuable impressions are made upon the mind by fictitious adventures, the same, in kind, though perhaps generally, not equal in degree, are made by real adventures; and

²⁹Review of [Joseph Warton] *An essay on the writings and genius of Pope*, in *Works*, ed. Murphy (London, 1796), II, 352.

facts with whatever view, and in whatever manner, treasured up in the mind, are ready to be applied to any farther and higher uses that they are capable of, whenever the person who is possessed of them is disposed to view them in any other light.

In this view all true history has a capital advantage over every work of fiction. Works of fiction are not, in their nature, capable in general, of any other uses than the authors of them had in view, which must necessarily be very limited; whereas true history, being an exhibition of the conduct of divine Providence; in which every thing has, perhaps, infinite relations and uses, is an inexhaustible mine of the most valuable knowledge.³⁰

An obvious conclusion from the foregoing type of reasoning occurred to some critics of the age: if history has a natural advantage over fiction, then fiction which is in some manner historical ought to be the most successful type. As the Quarterly review said of Scott's Tales of my landlord:

....it ought to increase the value of his portraits, that human beings have actually sate for them. These coincidences between fiction and reality are perhaps the very circumstances to which the success of these novels is in a great measure to be attributed: for, without depreciating the merit of the artist, every spectator at once recognizes in those scenes and faces which are copied from nature an air of distinct reality, which is not attached to fancy-pieces however happily conceived and elaborately executed....every one....almost insensibly recognizes....that which is copied from existing nature, and....forthwith clings to it with that kindred interest which thinks nothing which is human indifferent to humanity.³¹

And Jeffrey had pursued the same point in the Edinburgh, upon the appearance of Waverley:

....he has....had virtue enough to be true to nature throughout, and to content himself, even in the marvellous parts of his story, with copying from actual existences, rather than from the phantasms of his own imagination....There is a consistency in nature and truth, the want of which may always be detected in the happiest combination of fancy....³²

³⁰Lectures on history (3rd ed.; Dublin, 1791), pp. 4-5.

³¹XVI (1816-17), 430.

³²XXIV (1814-15), 208.

But Hazlitt went beyond both of these in enthusiasm and in felicity of phrase:

Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life; and that, if we can but arrive at what men feel, do, and say in striking and singular situations, the result will be 'more lively, audible, and full of vent,' than the fine-spun covwebs of the brain....He is only the amanuensis of truth and history. It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is.³³

To be sure, the whole contention of the superior impressiveness of truth over fiction was flatly denied by some of the formal critics, for reasons as ingenious as those of Hurd on the other side. No less a writer than Kames lent his weight to the argument, thus:

The effect of history in point of instruction, depends in some measure upon its veracity. But history cannot reach the heart, while we indulge any reflection upon the facts. Such reflection, if it engage our belief, never fails at the same time to poison our pleasure, by convincing us that our sympathy for those who are dead and gone is absurd. And if reflection be laid aside, history stands upon the same footing with fable. What effect either of them may have to raise our sympathy depends on the vivacity of the ideas they raise; and with respect to that circumstance, fable is generally more successful than history.³⁴

.....
.....
Upon the whole, it is by means of ideal presence [one of Kames's favorite concepts] that our passions are excited; and

³³"Sir Walter Scott" (in The spirit of the age), Collected Works (London and New York, 1903), IV, 246-47. See also Critical review 3rd series, I (1804), 52; Edinburgh review, XI (1807-08), 448-49. Scott himself possibly took this view of his novels; for in the general preface to the Waverley novels (Edinburgh, 1831-34), he described one stage in his early reading as follows: "Familiar acquaintance with the specious miracles of fiction brought with it some degree of satiety, and I began, by degrees, to seek in histories, memoirs, voyages and travels, and the like, events nearly as wonderful as those which were the work of imagination, with the additional advantage that they were at least in a great measure true." See Waverley novels (Edinburgh and London, 1831-34), I, vi-viii.

³⁴Elements of criticism (1762), I, 116.

till words produce that charm they avail nothing. Even real events intitled to our belief, must be conceived present and passing in our sight before they can move us.³⁵

Even Priestley, though he was a strong advocate of the reading of history, and though he asserted that truth had an invulnerable power to impress the mind, nevertheless recognized as did Kames the nature of the advantage possessed by fiction in moving the affections:

The faithful historian, and the writer of romances, having the same access to the springs, of the human passions, it is no wonder that the latter generally moves them more forcibly, since he hath the choice of every circumstance that contributes to raise them; whereas the former hath nothing in his power but the disposition of them, and is restricted even in that.³⁶

And a later pundit, N. A. Vigors, repeated the argument of Kames in all essential respects:

....when we drop the idea of the actor [in drama], and think of the real character which he personates, it is evident that the only impression which the representation can give us is that of being supposititious: for the more true it is that Macbeth or Richard once existed, the less probable it must be that they sustain a part in the dramatick action. Such considerations are, I think, sufficient to place the possibility of greater truth and reality being imparted to dramatick poetry, by means of history, out of the question.³⁷

These academic refutations, however, to the contrary, the "true" story prospered. We must agree with Johnson that "the heart naturally loves truth," especially if the truth be romantic, or bizarre, or scandalous. The narrative "based on fact" will always have, as it always has had, a certain minimum of popularity, whether the literary criticism of any one moment is in sympathy with it or not. In the eighteenth century the bait of

³⁵Ibid., p. 118.

³⁶A course of lectures on oratory and criticism (London, 1777), pp. 80-81.

³⁷Nature and extent of poetick licence (2nd ed.; London, 1813), p. 88.

"fact" was dangled so often, in the writing and advertizing of fiction, that it must have ceased to fool any but the stupidest of readers; yet it has continued even to this day to have its occasional usefulness as a stimulus to the imagination, as witness the notebooks of the Marquessa in The Bridge of San Luis Rey.

The eighteenth-century reader had, of course, more than these pleasant deceptions to feed his sense of fact. The pretense of truth in fiction was only one element, and a disreputable one at that. The great awakening of the age to the advantages of the wide observation and detailed study of the phenomena of human life, comes from beyond the limits of belles lettres, and may possibly be a further sign of the spirit of empirical inquiry which developed in the later seventeenth century and was symbolized by the prestige of the Royal Society. The informational and discursive types of literature show its influence earlier than do the more distinctly creative ones; thus the journalistic essay, the history, the biography, all developed a technique of conscientious realism while fiction was still in the stage of sentimental or comic romance.

Of this mood of humanistic inquiry there could be no more appropriate spokesman than Mark Akenside, whose activities spanned perfectly the gap between strict science and literature. In the beginning of the Third Book of The pleasures of imagination, in its first version (1744), he made his bow to uniformity and "common nature," and then painted a picture that would not have disappointed the most ambitious and daring of investigators of human nature. To quote:

What wonder, therefore, since the endearing ties
Of passion link the universal kind
Of man so close, what wonder if to search
This common nature through the various change
Of sex, and age. and fortune. and the frame

Of each peculiar, draw the busy mind
With unresisted charms? The spacious west,
And all the teeming regions of the south,
Hold not a quarry, to the curious flight
Of Knowledge, half so tempting or so fair,
As man to man. Nor only where the smiles
Of Love invite; nor only where the applause
Of cordial Honour turns the attentive eye
On Virtue's graceful deeds. For since the course
Of things external acts in different ways
On human apprehensions, as the hand
Of Nature tempered to a different frame
Peculiar minds; so, haply, where the powers
Of Fancy neither lessen nor enlarge
The images of things, but paint in all
Their gemmine hues, the features which they wore
In Nature; there Opinion will be true,
And Action right. For Action treads the path
In which Opinion says he follows good,
Or flies from evil: and Opinion gives
Report of good or evil, as the scene
Was drawn by Fancy, lovely or deformed:
Thus her report can never there be true
Where Fancy cheats the intellectual eye,
With glaring colors and distorted lines.³⁸

The admonition to study the details of real life is found ever and anon in the discursive writing of the age. It is an obvious admonition in itself, but it meant something particular in the eighteenth century by virtue of the new biography and the new history, more minute in method and less grandiose in sentiment than their seventeenth-century forbears. The interest in and acquaintance with the details of ordinary existence was one of the fads of the period. Boswell, for example, advised Zelide to "study history, plain and certain parts of human knowledge, and above all endeavour to relish the common affairs of life." For, he said, "David Hume....wisely and calmly concludes that the business of ordinary life is the proper employment of man."³⁹ James Beattie made it his dictum that young persons should become acquainted

³⁸Cf. Collins, "The manners, an ode," Poems, ed. Blunden (London, 1929), pp. 104-07.

³⁹Boswell to Isabella de Zuylen, July 9, 1764, Letters of James Boswell (Oxford, 1924), I, 49-50.

"with Moral nature, that is, with human passions and characters; which, however, as Horace intimates, cannot be thoroughly understood, but by careful observation of....real life."⁴⁰ He also recommended as a cure for levity "geometry, and history, and those parts and systems of philosophy, which recommend benevolence, and a lowly mind, and lead to the observation of life and manners."⁴¹

IV

Of all the forms taken by the "observation of life and manners," the art of biography bears in some ways the closest resemblance to that of the novel -- both being personal in emphasis, and both possessing problems of narration and character-analysis. Biography in the eighteenth century somewhat antedated fiction in the acquisition of a respectable standard and status in realism. By the middle of the century Samuel Johnson could say, without being revolutionary, that, since our passions are "more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life.... therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivating than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful...."⁴² Biography had begun to assume a realistic aspect as early, in fact, as 1700. It and its readers had drifted away from the mood of idealization and panegyric, and had become more cautiously critical and, in a manner, scientific. It was Johnson

⁴⁰Dissertations moral and critical (Dublin, 1783), I, 205.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 238.

⁴²The Rambler, No. 60 (1750).

himself who, as it were codified the rules of biography so comprehensively as to make subsequent remarks on the subject seem like little more than copies of his own.⁴³ His views, as put formally in Rambler No. 60 and Idler No. 84 (1759), and expressed piecemeal on numerous other occasions,⁴⁴ swing on the idea that "there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful."⁴⁵ Biography need not contain remarkable incidents, even when it treats of remarkable men; "domestic privacies" reveal the true character of the great man as well as of

⁴³See, e.g., Blair, Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres (New York, 1814), p. 409 (No. 36); Mackenzie, the Lounger, No. 29 (1785); John Davis, "An essay on biography and Egotism in writing," European magazine, XXXIII (1798), 12-14.

The statement above is not precisely fair to Boswell, whose ideas of method in biography are expressed in an individual manner, though as to the general principles he hardly differed from Johnson. See The Hypochondriack (Nos. 25 and 35) ed. M. Bailey (Stanford University, 1928), I, 299, and II, 13-14; Letters to Bishop Percy, Mar. 20, 1786 (Letters of James Boswell, ed. Tinker (Oxford, 1924), II, 326), and to the Rev. Wm. Temple, Feb. 24, 1788 (Ibid., II, 344); Life of Johnson, ed. Hill, I, 25. (Mt. Vernon, New York, 1928--).

The materials among the Malahide Papers relating to the Life of Johnson (Private papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle.... Mt. Vernon, New York, 1928, Vol. VI), reveal even more than Boswell's direct statements his notions of biographical purpose and method. His notes (ibid., pp. 24 ff., 41-62, 156 ff.), in which conversations and incidents are caught with remarkably precise detail; his Journals (ibid., pp. 65 ff., 186 ff.), in which the bare reality of the Notes takes on coherent shape without losing its original effect; and the Life itself, worked up sometimes from the Journals and sometimes even directly from the Notes (ibid., p. 184) -- all these, seen together, show a feeling for the intrinsic value of the objective and the particular, the unmodified and for the most part unanalyzed facts of speech and action, that goes beyond any other biographical technique of the eighteenth century in realism, and indeed surpasses any novel of the period in the particular quality of "thickness."

⁴⁴E.g., Idler, No. 102 (1760); review of the Life of Benvenuto Cellini, Works (1796), II, 196; "Cowley," Lives of the English poets, ed. Hill, I, 1; Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. Hill, II, 79; II, 166; II, 446; IV, n. 5; IV, 53; V, 79; V, 240.

⁴⁵The Rambler, No. 60.

the little. A biographer must consequently know his man personally; in fact, it would be all the better if the man were himself. And the biographer's attitude must be one of stern respect for the truth: he must give an undistorted and comprehensive view of his subject, hence he is privileged and required to omit no pertinent facts of whatever unromantic or unpleasant character. No more than this could well be asked for, in principle (though of course various ages have their special limitations as to what they consider a pertinent fact in the life of a person). It constituted a new and immeasurably fruitful rule of method for biography, and also for fiction after that art became freer of romantic preoccupations than it was in 1750.

V

For, of course, fiction was by its history susceptible enough to the application of this method. Even in the days when fiction was of low repute, before Richardson and Fielding initiated its rise to a new respectability, it maintained, along with the claptrap of romance, traditions of realism in such things as scandal novels and fictitious rogue-tales, and reached a high point of realistic excellence in Defoe (though this fact was not appreciated at the time). On the margin of fiction was the very important contribution of the sketches in the Tatler and Spectator and their imitators. There was also a novel of manners of a sort.⁴⁶ In short, regardless of the low grade of performance in most cases, there was sufficient on which a criterion of realism could be built, even before Richardson and Fielding appeared. It would be

⁴⁶See Charlotte E. Morgan, The rise of the novel of manners (New York, 1911).

safe to say that these masters produced no revolution in taste. Their popularity would not have been nearly so great if they had not done something for which the country was prepared by previous, though feeble, efforts.

But whatever the causes, it was evident that the idea of real life and manners -- that is to say, of typical locality -- as a desideratum in fiction was, by 1750, in a recognizable form. It is evident, also, that the possibilities of this doctrine were a long way from being fully understood.

One thing that stood in the way was that old notion of the novel as a humble instrument of moral instruction. The dead weight of this idea will be seen by a brief glance at Johnson's idea of the usefulness of fiction, as he expressed it in Rambler No. 4. His doctrine was, that fiction which portrayed life accurately (under strict moral censorship, to be sure) could be of service in instructing "the young, the ignorant, and the idle." The censorship arose, probably, out of a consideration of the difference between fictitious and real characters. Johnson proposed no such censorship for biography.⁴⁷ Real facts must be reckoned with somehow. Johnson had imbibed enough of the scientific spirit to realize that necessity. But fictitious events could still be brought under the doctrine of la belle nature. Fictions had a generalizing force upon the mind of the reader, which the individual and singular occurrences of biography did not. Their positive force as examples must therefore be properly directed.

A certain appearance of real life was necessary, however, in Johnson's view. The scene should not contain elements positively at variance with ordinary life; hence the stuff of romance was

⁴⁷See especially Rambler, No. 60, and Idler, No. 84.

excluded, since it showed human beings acting beyond the literal possibilities of human action. Departures from literal and particular truth were permissible and necessary only in a precautionary way; that is, whenever the possible moral effect of a scene imitated from real life was to be considered.⁴⁸

This precedence of morals over esthetics in the criticism of fiction, and the reduction of fiction to the status of a humble instrument of instruction, have been often noted -- so often, indeed, that a conventional opinion has arisen among historians of the novel, that the history of later eighteenth-century fiction is one of emancipation from moralistic slavery, and an assertion of its dignity as a major form of art. This opinion is sound insofar as the humble position of fiction is concerned (notwithstanding the reception of Richardson and Fielding). It is sound also as regards the assignment of moralistic aims to the earlier fiction. But it does violence to the facts in one respect: it obscures the fact that moralistic aims continued to be demanded of fiction even after its "emancipation." In truth, fiction did not

⁴⁸This doctrine explains the emphasis both on reality and on morals in such statements as the following:

(1) Monthly review, IV (1750-51), 160: "...the manners of her persons, together with the incidents of her story, are most of them within the bounds of nature, and agreeable to what we daily see in common life. But...here are no striking characters, no interesting events, nor in short any thing that will strongly fix the attention, or greatly improve the morals of the reader."

(2) Constantia; or, a true picture of human life (London, 1751), Vol. I, Preface, p. xix: "Strict regard to truth should appear in every character, no fictitious virtues introduced, no extenuation of vices [...]nothing that may inflame or sooth [sic] the passions....instead of creating a constancy of mind in pursuing virtue...."

(3) Review of above, Monthly review, V (1751), 14: [The stories lack] "that air of familiarity in which the distress arises from incidents of a more common nature, to which every reader may be exposed....An author who understands the passions, knows how to convey instruction, to excite the attention, and to raise the tenderest sensations of grief and pity, without bloodshed and without murder."

so much drop one purpose for another, as add a new purpose, to its betterment as art. The requirement of realism within limits for moral instruction which Johnson proposed in the fourth Rambler was still in force after 1800.⁴⁹ The difference lay in the superior impressiveness of the newer fiction, which was by this time allowed to have merit as a form of literary art.

But upon what grounds was it so allowed? A convenient answer to this question (though not designed as such by its author) has by chance been provided also by Johnson. Johnson saw that it was a problem what could be profitably used for literary material in ages succeeding his own -- the great universals having been already so often used as to be somewhere near worn out, and the dangers thereby increased of wandering into false ingenuity in the search for something new. The way out of this unhappy dilemma he discovered, and pointed out to the world, at the very time when the new geniuses of fiction were being hailed. "It will now be natural to inquire," he said, in the Adventurer, No. 95 (1753), "by what arts are the writers of the present and future ages to attract the notice and favour of mankind." The answer compromised the principle of uniformity dangerously, yet in a way so plausible as to look both innocuous and attractive:

They are to observe [he said] the alterations which time is always making in the modes of life, that they may gratify every generation with a picture of themselves. Thus love is uniform, but courtship is perpetually varying....the passions, from whence arise all the pleasures and pains that we see and hear of, if we analyze the mind of man, are very few; but those few agitated and combined, as external causes shall happen to operate, and modified by prevailing opinions and acci-

⁴⁹See, e.g., "Monthly review, new series, LXIV (1811), 435; Quarterly review, VII (1812), 331; Sir Walter Scott, Introduction to The fortunes of Nigel, Waverley novels (1831-34), XXVI, v; idem, "Henry Fielding," Misc. prose works (Cadell, 1827), III, 121-23.

dental caprices, make such frequent alterations on the surface of life, that the show, while we are busy in delineating it, vanishes from the view, and a new set of objects succeed....⁵⁰

The function thus assigned to future writers in general, "to gratify every generation with a picture of themselves," was already being urged upon fiction. It has been seen how the critics welcomed the realism of Richardson and Fielding; the contrast between romance and real life was familiar to the critical mind, and he who favored the latter was on the side of good sense. Critics of the mid-eighteenth century, when they stooped to consider fiction, did not fail to praise the fidelity to real life and to condemn romance. One reviewer recommended stories with incidents "familiar, practical, and probable to be met with in the course of common life," as against romances.⁵¹ Another said of the work under his eye that it was "a romance of the modern stamp: that is to say, his characters and adventures are not brought from beyond the bounds of nature, but are such as may be met with in real life."⁵² This may be classification rather than praise; but in view of what most persons of sober judgment held concerning romances, it can not unreasonably be construed as the latter. Certainly the following, from the pen of Cambridge, has clear enough emphasis:

....some of these original stories [in the Arabian Nights] contain useful morals and well-drawn pictures from common life: and it may be to those stories, perhaps, that we owe that spe-

⁵⁰On another occasion Johnson argued for novelty without so carefully paying his respects to uniformity (Rambler, No. 121): ".... in the boundless regions of possibility, which fiction claims for her dominion, there are surely a thousand recesses unexplored, a thousand flowers unlucked, a thousand fountains unexhausted, combinations of imagery yet unobserved, and races of ideal habitants not hitherto described."

⁵¹Monthly review, IV (1750-51), 356-57.

⁵²Ibid., V (1751), 44.

cies of writing which is at once so entertaining and instructive, and in which a very eminent wit, to the honour of this nation, has shown himself so incomparably superior in drawing natural characters.⁵³

One of the essentials of a taste for realism as we know it today is a relish for the sheer reality of the persons of the story, regardless of whether they are "interesting people" or not. The elegant taste of the eighteenth century would, one might suspect, not be too favorable to personages in a novel who lacked distinction, whether for virtue or villainy. The critical nose can be observed to turn up at "low" and "vulgar" scenes in fiction as elsewhere. And one critic at the end of the century undoubtedly spoke for many of his countrymen when he rejected "everyday characters" as being incapable of exciting strong interest.⁵⁴ Still, the endeavor to do an everyday novel did not necessarily meet with disapproval; indeed, the praise which most mid-century novels of this sort received was probably as great as the performance warranted. Mrs. Haywood's History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless was very decently treated by the Monthly review, which noted with interest the minute circumstantiality of the description, and commented on the difficulty of the task set by the author in treating a character of so little distinction for good or bad as Betsy; indicating, in fact, that the author had done rather well with such unpromising matter.⁵⁵ The author of an unimportant piece entitled The life and adventures of Mr. Francis Clive was said by the same journal to have succeeded best "in describing mean and worthless characters, not with humour....but as they probably are found in

⁵³The World, No. 70 (1754).

⁵⁴Monthly review, new series, XXII (1797), 282.

⁵⁵v (1751), 394.

real life."⁵⁶ A certain History of Eliza got this commendation from the Critical:

Tho' this performance is of the novel kind, yet we scarcely meet with an occurrence in it which may not happen in common life, without appearing extraordinary. It exhibits a proof that rational sentiments, just reflections, and an elegant narrative, more than compensate for the want of wonderful incidents, violent emotions, sublime characters, floods of grief, and seas of sorrow.⁵⁷

And the Monthly thought fit to indulge, in 1770. in the following generalization:

Among the works that have amusement for their object, there are none, perhaps, so engaging as those which, under fictitious names, exhibit scenes and adventures that might have happened in real life....Deceived by his [the writer's] art, we forget, for a time, that his representations are feigned....⁵⁸

To claim such popularity for the story of real life was possibly an exaggeration, but no essential falsification. Yet the criticism of such fictional matter was neither so copious nor so acute in 1770 as it was fifty years later. The reason is not to be found in the quantity of fiction, for that was always large enough; it may lie to some extent in the quality, however. The few brilliant performances in realistic fiction up to that date were scanty material from which to generalize. The reason lies also, doubtless, in the humble reputation of fiction, which long prevented that art from commanding the most serious attention.

But these causes were not all. There was also the fact that fiction changed in its very intentions. Though the critics were quick enough to perceive these intentions, they could hardly ever be observed to have anticipated them. When Fielding provided them with "real life" of an authenticity sufficient to set off

⁵⁶XXX (1764), 243.

⁵⁷Critical review, XXII (1766), 434.

⁵⁸XLIII, 362-65.

against romantic fiction, their ideas went no farther than this contrast. The novel of everyday life which suppressed the devices (such as highly complicated and organized plot and denouement) that might divert a reader's attention from the realism of the scene, and which endeavored to give as intense an impression of ordinariness as possible, had not as yet been well executed; or at least, this particular genre was hardly established, as an entity in the critic's mind. But by about 1800 a very considerable change was taking place in the complexion of the novel, and the critics were seeing a great light. Hence arose a taste for realism that tried to reproduce the precise appearance and effect of ordinary persons and typical places, and what is more important still, sequences of events more designed to impart a sense of ordinary life than to give the reader the excitement of a well devised plot.

The measure of this progress is the impression which the works of Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen made on some few (at least) of their critical readers. In 1809 there appeared in the Quarterly review these remarks concerning the former:

As a writer of tales and novels, she has a very marked peculiarity. It is that of venturing to dispense common sense to her readers, and to bring them within the precincts of real life and natural feeling....Her heroes and heroines, if such they may be called, are never miraculously good, nor detestably wicked. They are such men and women as we see and converse with every day of our lives; with the same proportionate mixture in them of what is right and what is wrong, of what is great and what is little. Rejecting the common-place sources of artificial interest, Miss Edgeworth derives her attraction from a genuine display of nature and a certain tone of rationality and good sense, which is the more pleasing, because in a novel it is so very new. The charm of probability by which her stories are so strongly characterized, is effected not only by an undeviating attention to nature, but by producing her under the forms in which she most usually presents herself, neglecting those which, though more imposing, are less frequent. Miss Edgeworth not only paints to the life, but loves to take subjects generally considered as dry and unproductive; such as are supposed unfit materials for fiction, because even in real life, they do not excite any

warmth of interest.⁵⁹

Now, though these sentiments bear some resemblance to many things said about Fielding, an important difference is marked by the stress on the ordinariness or dulness of Miss Edgeworth's materials, and her rejection of the unusual. And if the change in taste for ordinary realities is no more than implied in the foregoing passage, it becomes perfectly explicit in the review of Jane Austen's novels which Scott wrote for the Quarterly in 1816. In this piece Scott was at great pains to explain that the novels of "former times" -- a vaguely defined period, but one which at any rate included the mid-eighteenth-century masters -- were in disagreement with real life in two significant respects -- the plot and the "sentiments." For the first:

....the author of novels was, in former times, expected to tread pretty much in the limits between the concentric circles of probability and possibility; and as he was not permitted to transgress the latter, his narrative, to make amends, almost always went beyond the bounds of the former. Now, although it may be urged that the vicissitudes of human life have occasionally led an individual through as many scenes of singular fortune as are represented in the most extravagant of these fictions, still the causes and personages acting on these changes have varied with the progress of the adventurer's fortune, and do not present that combined plot, (the object of every skilful novelist,) in which all the more interesting individuals of the *dramatis personae* have their appropriate share in the action and in bringing about the catastrophe. Here, even more than in its various and violent changes of fortune, rests the improbability of the novel.⁶⁰

This admission of the "improbability" of the well-made plot is an extremely interesting substitution of a new realistic criterion for the classic "rules" of the "epopeia" which, as a matter of

⁵⁹II, 146-47. Cf. Scott, *ibid.*, III (1810), 340-41: "Nor do we owe less to Miss Edgeworth, whose true and vivid pictures of modern life contain the only sketches reminding us of the human beings, whom, secluded as we are, we have actually seen and conversed with in various parts of this great metropolis."

⁶⁰XIV, 190-91.

fact, Scott normally expressed respect for, though he confessed finding them hard to follow.⁶¹

But it is the second disagreement of the older novels with real life that concerns the problem of characterization mainly. Here if not in the former point Scott must have felt that he was criticizing his own practices,⁶² yet he was for the moment an enthusiastic opponent of any characterizations less true to ordinary life than Jane Austen's. Under the old rule, says Scott, "The novelist professed to give an imitation of nature";

but it was, as the French say, *la belle nature*. Human beings, indeed, were presented, but in the most sentimental mood, and with minds purified by a sensibility which often verged on extravagance. In the serious class of novels, the hero was usually

'A knight of love, who never broke a vow.'
And although, in those of a more humorous cast, he was permitted a license, borrowed either from real life or from the libertinism of the drama, still a distinction was demanded even from *Peregrine Pickle*, or *Tom Jones*; and the hero, in every folly of which he might be guilty, was studiously vindicated from the charge of infidelity of the heart. The heroine was, of course, still more immaculate; and to have conferred her affections upon any other than the lover to whom the reader had destined her from their first meeting, would have been a crime against sentiment which no author, of moderate prudence, would have hazarded, under the old regime.⁶³

In spite of the suggestion of facetiousness, the passage shows its author undoubtedly looking to particular reality, instead of universal nature, as a new and interesting criterion of artistic effect. The sense of reality provided even by Fielding is, for the time being, too thin for his taste; he wants a more

⁶¹See, for instance, *The fortunes of Nigel*, introductory epistle, *Waverley Novels* (London, 1932) [XVI,] xvii-xviii, xxi-xxii.

⁶²Note his comparison of himself and Jane Austen in the *Journal* (New York, 1891) for Mar. 14, 1826: "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with. The Big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied me."

⁶³Quarterly review, XIV, 191-92.

intense illusion. The way in which he proceeds to characterize Jane Austen's work makes this point quite obvious:

Accordingly a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in the points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credibility nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident, or by those pictures of romantic affection and sensibility, which were formerly as certain attributes of fictitious characters as they are of rare occurrence among those who actually live and die. The substitute for these excitements, which had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them, was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.

....the scenes of Miss Edgeworth are laid in higher life, varied by more romantic incident, and by her remarkable power of embodying and illustrating national character. But the author of *Emma* confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard. The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her *dramatis personae* conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognize as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances.⁶⁴

This, then, was the realistic novel, new style, as it existed in the early nineteenth century -- a convincing argument for the prophetic skill of Johnson in his Adventurer paper. In plot it was to avoid that close articulation of elements which, however artistic, seldom agrees with actual life. In character it was to eschew all that, however gratifying to the sense of ideal personality, seemed beyond the range of common occurrence. The result was to be a kind of fiction which should seem as little fictional as possible.

It was, in short, to immerse the reader in those particularities which the pundits of uniformity had denominated as a lower

⁶⁴ibid., pp. 192-93. Richard Whately, in his review of later publications of Jane Austen, echoes these ideas. See below, p.118 n. 66, No. 16 (on p.120).

class of artistic matter; and yet, by selecting from among particular localities and objects those most normal as to the exhibition of human phenomena, it was to attain equally to the uniform.

This conclusion was nowhere more clearly expressed than in the Edinburgh review article by Jeffrey in 1810 on Crabbe's Borough, a piece which, though in verse, nevertheless virtually belongs to realistic fiction. For frank advocacy of limitation of the concept of the universal to matters of common observation, it can hardly be surpassed.

The chief delight of poetry consists [says the reviewer], not so much in what it directly supplies to the imagination, as in what it enables it to supply to itself.... Now, this highest and most delightful effect can only be produced by the poet's striking a note to which the heart and the affections naturally vibrate in unison.... But it is evident, that the emotions connected with common and familiar objects.... are of all others the most likely to answer this description, and to produce, where they can be raised to a sufficient height, this great effect in its utmost perfection. It is for this reason that the images and affections that belong to our universal nature, are always, if tolerably represented, infinitely more captivating, in spite of their apparent commonness and simplicity, than those that are peculiar to certain situations, however they may come recommended by novelty or grandeur.⁶⁵

The limitations of such a doctrine in respect to the whole run of the world's poetry need not cause any one concern. As an apology for the realism of the common-place, and even of low life, it has not been substantially bettered to the present day. It is the idea which, with scientific trimmings, so well served French Naturalism later in the century, and through the impact of that movement, is still producing results. It is the idea the antiquity of which eluded William Dean Howells, with the result that in his Criticism and fiction he praised English fiction for having at last freed itself from shackles which it had

⁶⁵XVI (1810), 32-33.

in fact broken long before -- only to patch them together again. But it is also an idea the ancestry of which lies in that part of the uniformitarian doctrine which admitted real life as a proper source of universals, and which tended to limit nature to the normal tendencies of actual existence. The chief virtue of fiction became, that it observed the probabilities of ordinary life. The novel came to occupy, after all, nothing more than the reverse side of the neo-classic shield.⁶⁶

⁶⁶The ubiquity of the doctrine here discussed becomes apparent in many utterances which are not particularly ostentatious, and for that reason do not at once reveal the weight of opinion behind them. The following texts are perhaps as characteristic of the form taken by the doctrine, as any that could be quoted. They are given in no sequence except a chronological one.

(1) Monthly review, new series, XXI (1796), 452: "To say that some of the conversations are insipid, and some of the characters unimportant, would be to censure the manners of the age, rather than the novel: for every writer of fictitious history ought to copy, as nearly as he can, living characters; and if dialogue in tonish company be frequently trifling and uninteresting, and if coxcombs and coquettes be not only suffered, but caressed and encouraged, in the fashionable circles, there can be no impropriety in introducing them into novels."

(2) Ibid., XXXIII (1800), 206: "The incidents in this novel appear, for the most part, to have been designed as representations of common life; and the language is easy and natural...."

(3) Ibid., XLV (1804), 211: "It is properly observed in that essay, that the events recorded in a novel should be precisely what may be supposed to take place, without exaggeration, in common life...."

(4) Critical review, 3rd series, II (1804), 326-27: "...probability becomes every day more difficult in this species of composition, The public voice is so loud in demanding novelty, that an author must have more than common powers of invention to observe the strict limits of probability...unfortunately, real life, the only criterion of probability, affords but a scanty portion of precedents....Perhaps it were better if we could be less fastidious in our clamor after novelty...the most common events may be rendered interesting when embellished with the style and incidental ornaments of an accurate observer of men and manners."

(5) William Godwin, Fleetwood (London, 1805), Preface: "In this little work the reader will scarcely find any thing "to elevate and surprise"; and, if it has any merit, it must consist in the liveliness with which it brings things home to the imagination,

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For there was in this realism little if any argument for particularity where it definitely opposed the universality demanded by the hackneyed yet still vigorous classical doctrine. Any one scene in a novel could have particularity enough, but it had to impress the reader as being typical or ordinary. The unusual

and the reality it gives to the scenes it portrays.

"Yet, even in the present narrative, I have aimed at a certain kind of novelty; a novelty, which may be aptly expressed by a parody on a well-known line of Pope; it relates --

'Things often done, but never yet described.'

In selecting among common and ordinary adventures, I have endeavoured to avoid such as a thousand novels before mine have undertaken to develop. Multitudes of readers have themselves passed through the very incidents I relate; but for the most part, no work has hitherto recorded them."

(6) Edinburgh review, VIII (1806), 465: "In the tales now before us [Mrs Opie's Simple tales], we find....the....happy art of presenting ordinary feelings and occurrences in a manner that irresistibly commands our sympathy and affection."

(7) Ibid., XI (1807-08), 453: "To similar causes [physical inferiority, domesticity, sociability], the softer sex owe their exquisite acquaintance with life and manners; their fine discernment of those smaller peculiarities of character which throw so much light and shade over the surface of ordinary society. Of the deeper varieties of mind they know little....it is the fire-side character of mankind which forms their chief study...."

(8) Critical review, 3rd series, XXI (1810), 43: "The Officer's Daughter is one of those tales which afford amusement by detailing the various incidents that occur in life, without any mixture of the marvellous.... The incidents or accidents which she [the heroine] does encounter, are what daily happen to young women, who enter into the society of persons of their own rank, or of superior circumstances."

(9) Ibid., XXII (1811), 300: "The lovers of the marvellous will not find entertainment in the perusal of the four volumes now before us....Mrs. Hervey has evinced some knowledge of character, but there is nothing at all new in her plot. The incidents.... are such as occur in familiar and fashionable life...."

(10) Quarterly review, X (1813-14), 304: "[Maria Edgeworth] has made some sacrifices which, if we are not mistaken, are peculiarly her own. Her pictures are all drawn in the soberest colours. She scarcely makes use of a single tint that is warmer than real life.

or abnormal in real life was regarded in much the same way as the fanciful and romantic. All these were under suspicion of being

No writer recurs so rarely, for the purpose of creating an interest, to the stronger and more impetuous feelings of our nature."

(11) Lady Morgan, O'Donnel (London, 1815), Preface: "Literary fiction, whether directed to the purpose of transient amusement, or adopted as an indirect medium of instruction, has always in its most genuine form exhibited a mirror of the times in which it is composed; reflecting morals, customs, manners, peculiarity of character, and prevalence of opinion,

"But....we find it....producing arbitrary models, derived from conventional modes of thinking amongst writers.... Ideal beauties, and ideal perfection takes the place of nature...."

(12) Review of the same, Monthly review, new series, LXXIV (1814), 110: "This fair author professes to have now for the first time made 'the flat realities of life' the subjects of her pen....and has skilfully entered the lists with Miss Edgeworth in the delineation of Irish character and manners."

(13) "Remarks on Mandeville," Blackwood's magazine, II, (1817-18), 402-03: "Latterly this department of literature [the novel].... has risen to a rank in the world of letters, little, if at all inferior to the most dignified productions of scholars and poets. Nor does there seem, in the nature of that sort of composition, any reason why this place should not be assigned it. The novel is the epic of comedy, or perhaps I should rather say, the epic of ordinary life. Its range is among the passions as well as the manners of men; and a skilful delineation of these, in a walk which can be understood as well as judged by every one of a tolerably liberal education, is certainly entitled to no mean place in the ranks of literature."

(14) Edinburgh review, XXXII(1819), 124: "Seeing, by the perfection of his art, the master passions in their springs, and the high capacities in their rudiments -- and having acquired the gift of tracing all the propensities and marking tendencies of our plastic nature, in their first slight indications, or from the very disguises they so often love to assume, he [Crabbe, in Tales of the Hall] does not need, in order to draw out his characters in all their life and distinctness, the vulgar demonstration of those striking and decided actions by which their maturity is proclaimed even to the careless and inattentive; but delights to point out to his readers, the seeds or tender filaments of those talents and feelings, and singularities, which wait only for occasion and opportunity to burst out and astonish the world -- and to accustom them to trace, in characters and actions apparently of the most ordinary description, the self-same attributes that, under other circumstances, would attract universal attention, and furnish themes for the most popular and impassioned descriptions."

(15) Ibid., XXXIII (1820), 8: [A reviewer of Ivanhoe sees more "fancy and romance," and less "nature and reality" than in previous works of the author. He shows a preference for] "the sober

"out of nature," and were generally accorded a low place in fictional values. The main theory of character and motive was still the universal operating under particular circumstances. And this was just as true for Scott and other novelists of local color -- the obvious aspect of locality -- as for any one.

Nevertheless, the important idea of the sense of particular reality as necessary to effect and edification, made the utilitarian principle work against itself. Though general nature remained the approved object of the writer's representation, it came to be thought that this general nature was best arrived at by localizing the characters -- that is to say, by giving them the special sort of imaginative solidity which derives from the sense

charms of truth and reality, -- the exquisite representation of scenes with which we are familiar, or the skilful development of affections which we have often experienced."

(16) Whately, Quarterly review, XXIV (1820-21), 353: "When this Flemish painting, as it were [*i.e.*, Jane Austen's novels], is introduced -- this accurate and unexaggerated delineation of events and characters -- it necessarily follows, that a novel, which makes good its pretensions of giving a perfectly correct picture of common life, becomes a far more instructive work than one of equal or superior merit of the other class....this will apply only to such fictions as are quite perfect in respect of the probability of their story....those sundry little violations of probability which are to be met with in most novels....so far lower their value, as models of real life, that a person who has no other preparation for the world than is afforded by them, would form, probably, a less accurate idea of things as they are, than he would of a lion from studying merely the representations on China teapots."

(17) Charles Lamb, "On the artificial comedy of the last century," Essays of Elia ed. Ainger (Troy, N.Y., [1902]), pp. 275-77: "Idle gallantry in a fiction, a dream, the passing pageant of an evening, startles us in the same way as the alarming indications of profligacy in a son or ward in real life should startle a parent or guardian. We have no such middle emotions as dramatic interests left....We substitute a real for a dramatic person, and try him accordingly. We have been spoiled with....the exclusive and all-devouring drama of common life [*italics mine*]; where the moral point is everything....We carry our fireside concerns to the theatre with us. We do not go thither, like our ancestors, to escape from the pressure of reality, so much as to confirm our experience of it.... We dread infection from the scenic representations of disorder, and fear a painted pustule."

of their being actual persons in an actual environment. And even though the persons and environments were typical rather than singular, and the novel of the day was more a genre picture than a study of individuals, there was still ~~the~~ feeling that there was some particular locus for the action. Indeed, the feeling of locality was more intense for typical places than for rare ones; the most real scenes, for the fiction reader of this day, were those which corresponded most readily with what he recognized as common in actual life. In any case, the sense of locality was what the novelist was certainly required to satisfy. And it is not hard to see in this situation the possibility that the idea of general nature should disintegrate, as an active principle in the novelist's imagination, being replaced by a feeling for particular circumstances of place and personality.

That it did disintegrate, and was so replaced, is a matter of literary history. The period of 1750-1830 was simply the preparation and the beginning. The uniformitarian esthetic, on the whole, dominated both the criticism and the creation of fiction at this time. But that esthetic contained within its own precepts the possibility of dangerous shifts of emphasis -- dangerous because fundamentally opposite to the general spirit of the esthetic, and all the more so because the opposition was not clearly understood.

The eighteenth century granted the uniformitarian principle. It believed that human nature was everywhere the same, and that the samenesses were the most proper matter for art. At the same time, it was enormously interested in particulars as they occurred in the actual world; it sought them in history, in biography, in scientific and sociological studies. And while it was possible to rationalize a harmony, as did Chesterfield and Johnson, between

the ideas of uniformity and of diversity, the ultimate effect of so doing was, to reduce uniformity to a mere harmless platitude.

That this was on the way to happening in the criticism of fiction, was evident by 1830. Characters were coming to be seen more as persons localized in space and time; that is, as individuals, not only in the sense of complex combinations of universal qualities, but also in the sense of persons produced by particular environments. In this, the first stage of the development of English fiction as a major art, the idea of locality, limited as it was, showed unmistakable signs of proceeding toward the position of importance that it holds today.

